

§ 209.323 Initial decision.

(a) The presiding officer shall prepare an initial decision after the closing of the record. The initial decision may dismiss the notice of proposed disqualification, in whole or in part, sustain the charges and proposed disqualification, or sustain the charges and mitigate the proposed disqualification.

(b) If the presiding officer sustains the charges and the proposed disqualification, dismisses some of the charges, or mitigates the proposed disqualification, the presiding officer shall issue and serve an appropriate order disqualifying respondent from engaging in the safety-sensitive functions described in § 209.303. If the presiding officer dismisses all of the charges set forth in notice of proposed disqualification, a dismissal order shall be issued and served.

(c) Each initial decision shall contain:

(1) Findings of fact and conclusions of law, as well as the reasons or bases therefor, upon all the material issues of fact and law presented on the record;

(2) An order, as described in paragraph (b) of this section;

(3) The dates any disqualification is to begin and end and other conditions, if any, that the respondent must satisfy before the disqualification order is discharged;

(4) The date upon which the decision will become final, as prescribed in § 209.325; and

(5) Notice of the parties' appeal rights, as prescribed in § 209.327.

(d) The decision shall be served upon the FRA Chief Counsel and the respondent. The Chief Counsel shall provide a copy of the disqualification order to the railroad by which the respondent is employed.

§ 209.325 Finality of decision.

(a) The initial decision of the presiding officer shall become final 35 days after issuance. Such decisions are not precedent.

(b) *Exception.* The initial decision shall not become final if, within 35 days after issuance of the decision, any party files an appeal under § 209.327. The timely filing of such an appeal shall stay the order in the initial decision.

§ 209.327 Appeal.

(a) Any party aggrieved by an initial decision issued under § 209.323 may file an appeal. The appeal must be filed within 35 days of issuance of the initial decision with the Federal Railroad Administrator, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590. A copy of the appeal shall be served on each party. The appeal shall set forth objections to the initial decision, supported by reference to applicable laws and regulations, and with specific reference to the record. If the Administrator has played any role in investigating, prosecuting, or deciding to prosecute the particular case, the Administrator shall recuse him or herself and delegate his or her authority under this section to a person not so involved.

(b) A party may file a reply to an appeal within 25 days of service of the appeal. If the party relies on evidence contained in the record for the reply, the party shall specifically refer to the pertinent evidence in the record.

(c) The Administrator may extend the period for filing an appeal or a response for good cause shown, provided the written request for extension is served before the expiration of the applicable period provided in paragraph (c) or (d) of this section.

(d) The Administrator has sole discretion to permit oral argument on the appeal. On the Administrator's own initiative or upon written motion by any party, the Administrator may determine that oral argument will contribute substantially to the development of the issues on appeal and may grant the parties an opportunity for oral argument.

(e) The Administrator may affirm, reverse, alter, or modify the decision of the presiding officer, or may remand the case for further proceedings before the presiding officer. The Administrator shall inform the parties and the presiding officer of his or her decision.

(f) The decision of the Administrator is final, constitutes final agency action, and is not subject to further administrative review.

§ 209.329 Assessment considerations.

(a) Proof of a respondent's willful violation of one of the requirements of parts 213 through 236 (excluding parts